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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO PEACE CORPS WEST AFRICA REGIONAL
DIRECTOR MCKOY

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SL

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PERRY CALLS ON MINISTER OF PRESIDENTIAL
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

REF: FREETOWN 80

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Ambassador Perry recently paid a courtesy call on the Minister for Presidential and Public Affairs Alhaji Alpha Kanu at State House, accompanied by the Public Affairs Officer. The discussion covered issues of mutual interest including an American company's presence in Sierra Leone, the possible return of the Peace Corps, and the Minister's own desire to attend a seminar in the U.S. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Perry met with the Minister of Presidential and Public Affairs Alhaji Alpha Kanu on March 7. The Ambassador reiterated U.S. congratulations on the peaceful and transparent Presidential and parliamentary elections of 2007 and expressed hope for a similar experience for the 2008 local council elections. She welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Minister on this courtesy call.

¶3. (C) Ambassador raised the issue of Seaboard West Africa Ltd., an American-owned company in Sierra Leone which had been facing a number of operational difficulties in Sierra Leone, stemming in part from a volatile global market for wheat compounded by the price ceiling on flour imposed by the Sierra Leone government in response to rising prices (reftel). She noted that Seaboard is also concerned that companies with "other national interests" are being favored for doing business in Sierra Leone. Seaboard's corporate headquarters has suggested that the company may have to leave the country despite its long-standing presence here. The Ambassador stressed the importance of fostering an environment conducive to investment and increasing the professionalization of business conduct, in general, in Sierra Leone. She identified the need to improve the investment climate as a key factor in attaining possible threshold status in the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Minister Kanu did not respond directly to the Ambassador's concerns about Seaboard's operations in Sierra Leone and offered no explanation of the GoSL actions and mandated price ceilings.

¶4. (C) Minister Kanu did inquire about the possibility of a return of the Peace Corps to Sierra Leone. He fondly recalled his own experience learning from Peace Corps Volunteer teachers in his youth. Ambassador Perry assured the Minister that she is in regular contact with Peace Corps leadership and has consistently advocated for its return.

¶5. (SBU) Minister Kanu also informed the Ambassador that he had been invited to participate in a 3-week leadership seminar at Harvard in June. While he was very much looking forward to the opportunity to attend the course, he was uncertain about covering the expense and inquired if the U.S.

could fund his attendance. The Ambassador did not commit to do so.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Minister Kanu serves as the Presidential spokesperson and is eloquent in expressing the views of President Koroma and the GoSL. Despite this eloquence, he failed to seize on the issues presented by Ambassador or provide commentary or insight. Instead, he turned what was a very brief meeting into an opportunity to seek assistance for the Harvard training, which we could obviously not promise to provide. END COMMENT.

PERRY